

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 11285 01 OF 02 081653Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----106767 081657Z /42

P R 081639Z JUL 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5943
INFO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 11285

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: UK, IS
SUBJECT: JEWISH CHRONICLE ON HMG CONTACTS WITH PALES-
TINIAN LIBERATION ORGANIZATION

SUMMARY: THE JEWISH CHRONICLE HAS FRONT-PAGED A STORY THAT THE BRITISH HAVE HAD DISCUSSIONS WITH LEADERS OF THE PLO. THE STORY DISTORTS STATEMENTS MADE BY A FCO OFFICER AT A NON-ATTRIBUTABLE BACKGROUND DISCUSSION AT ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS. FCO OFFICERS HAVE HAD INFORMAL CONTACT WITH PLO REPS FOR YEARS. AND FCO STATES THERE ARE NO ON-GOING FCO DISCUSSIONS WITH PLO.
END SUMMARY

1. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS HELD INFORMAL DISCUSSION MEETING OF SOME 20 LOCAL MIDDLE EAST EXPERTS AND ACADEMICS AT ITS BUILDING, CHATHAM HOUSE, EVENING JULY 4. SPEAKER WAS ROGER TOMKYS, HEAD OF FCO NEAR EAST DEPT., ON SUBJECT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY AND THE ARAB-ISRAELI ISSUE. EMBOFF WAS ONLY NON-BRITISH OFFICER PRESENT. TOMKYS REVIEWED IN GENERAL TERMS THE EVOLUTION OF THE RECENT EC-9 STATEMENT ON THE ARAB-ISRAELI ISSUE.

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2. FRANK DISCUSSION, WHICH ACCORDING TO CHATHAM HOUSE RULES IS OFF THE RECORD AND NON-ATTRIBUTABLE, THEN ENSUED. TOMKYS WAS ASKED ABOUT FCO CONTACTS WITH PLO, AND PARTICULARLY HOW PLO FOREIGN AFFAIRS SPOKESMAN QADDUMI WOULD BE RECEIVED IF HE CAME TO LONDON. TOMKYS REPLIED THAT QADDUMI WOULD BE RECEIVED EITHER BY TOMKYS OR ASSISTANT UNDER SECRETARY WEIR. TOMKYS DID NOT INDICATE

THAT THERE ARE ANY ON-GOING DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE FCO AND THE PLO.

3. DURING DISCUSSION PERIOD, EMBOFF WAS ASKED IF THERE HAS BEEN ANY CHANGE ON US POLICY TOWARDS DEALING WITH PLO. EMBOFF STATED THE PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED US POLICY OF WITHHOLDING RECOGNITION OR DISCUSSIONS WITH PLO AS LONG AS REQUIRED PRE-CONDITIONS ARE NOT MET. MAIN THRUST OF EMBOFF'S REMARKS WAS TO DENY SIMPLISTIC ASSERTION THAT US CAN CONTROL ISRAELI POLICY BY CUTTING OFF MILITARY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, AND TO STRESS THAT MOST IMPORTANT THING FOR US TO DO NOW WITH NEW ISRAELI GOVERNMENT IS "KEEP TALKING".

4. PRESENT AT THE DISCUSSION WAS JOSEPH FINKLESTONE. FOREIGN EDITOR OF THE WEEKLY JEWISH CHRONICLE, THE PRINCIPAL ORGAN OF THE BRITISH JEWISH COMMUNITY. JULY 8 ISSUE OF JEWISH CHRONICLE CONTAINS FRONT-PAGE ARTICLE BY FINKLESTONE HEADLINED, "BRITISH HOLD TALKS WITH PLO ENVOYS". FIRST PARAGRAPHS OF ARTICLE READ AS FOLLOWS: BEGIN QUOTE: LEADING MEMBERS OF THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION HAVE HAD UNOFFICIAL DISCUSSIONS WITH OFFICIALS OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT. BRITAIN STILL REFUSES TO EXTEND FULL RECOGNITION TO YASIR ARAFAT'S PLO, INSISTING THAT IT MUST FIRST RECOGNIZE THE STATE OF ISRAEL.

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HOWEVER, AS A MEMBER OF THE COMMON MARKET, BRITAIN FEELS THAT SHE MUST PLAY A ROLE IN BRIDGINQ THE GAP BETWEEN THE PLO AND ISRAEL, SO THAT PEACE TALKS CAN BEGIN. IT HAS BEEN KNOWN FOR SOME TIME THAT FRENCH AND ITALIAN OFFICIALS HAVE HAD REGULAR CONTACTS WITH THE PLO. BUT THE ROLE PLAYED BY BRITAIN HAS SO FAR NOT BEEN REVEALED. THESE BRITISH-PLO CONTACTS HAVE TAKEN PLACE WITH THE KNOWLEDGE AND APPROVAL OF THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION. END QUOTE

5. UPON READING THE ARTICLE MORNING JULY 8, TOMKYS WAS IRATE, TO SAY THE LEAST. HE PHONED ISRAELI EMBASSY AND REASSURED LATTER THAT CONTRARY TO FINKLESTONE ARTICLE THER ARE NO ON-GOING DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE FCO AND THE PLO, NOR IS HMG ACTING IN COORDINATION WITH USG IN DEALINGS WITH PLO. TOMKYS CONSIDERS THAT TO THE DEGREE THAT FINKLESTONE DREW ON THE CHATHAM HOUSE DISCUSSION FOR HIS ARTICLE, HIS ARTICLE REPRESENTS A COMPLETE DIS-

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TORTION OF WHAT WAS SAID. TOMKYS TOLD EMBOFF THAT NEITHER HE NOR ANY OF HIS OFFICERS WOULD ATTEND SUCH CHATHAM HOUSE DISCUSSIONS IN THE FUTURE. IN SEPARATE CONVERSATION WITH KEITH KYLE OF CHATHAM HOUSE, TOMKYS EVIDENTLY AMENDED THIS THREAT BY ADDING, "IF FINKLESTONE IS PRESENT AGAIN". KYLE IS EMBARRASSED AND DISTRESSED. HE REALIZES THAT FINKLESTONE DREW AT LEAST IN PART ON THE CHATHAM HOUSE DISCUSSION IN ORDER TO WRITE A POTENTIALLY CONTROVERSY-STIMULATING PIECE. BUT NOTES THAT FINKLESTONE CAREFULLY AVOIDED REFERRING TO CHATHAM HOUSE OR QUOTING INDIVIDUALS.

6. COMMENT: LATTER QUIBBLE IS SOMEWHAT BESIDES THE POINT. FINKLESTONE ARTICLE IMPLIES HE HAD INSIDE KNOWLEDGE, AND HE MISREPRESENTS WHAT TOMKYS SAID. IT IS NO NEWS THAT PLO OFFICIALS HAVE TALKED TO BRITISH OFFICIALS FOR YEARS, BUT FINKLESTONE GIVES THE IMPRESSION THAT THIS IS A NEW DEVELOPMENT. NEITHER TOMKYS NOR EMBOFF STATED DURING THE DISCUSSION THAT BRITISH-PLO CONTACTS HAVE TAKEN PLACE WITH APPROVAL OF USG. SHOULD BE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT FINKLESTONE HAS WIDE CIRCLE OF CONTACTS AND CORRESPONDENTS IN UK AND ABROAD ON WHOM HE MIGHT ALSO HAVE DRAWN FOR HIS STORY.

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7. FULL TEXT OF ARTICLE POUCHED TO NEA/IAI AND NEA/RA.

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Message Attributes

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Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
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TAGS: SOPN, PGOV, UK, IS, PLO
To: STATE
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